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STATE FOR NEA/PI-OKIRBY, NEA/ELA-SWILLIAMS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM KMPI JO

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL REFORM AND IFES ASSESSMENT MISSION

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. DAVID HALE
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

¶1. (C) Summary. MEPI Committee members met with IFES local coordinator Mohammed Tarawneh on March 8 to further explore IFES, request to conduct an assessment of Jordanian electoral procedures and laws beginning March 22. Given the sensitivity of the electoral reform issue here, and IFES, proposal that its American staff approach Jordanian politicians and others, seeking their responses to a lengthy questionnaire on this issue, post does not/not support the travel of the IFES team at this time, and we request that MEPI Washington not approve funding for this travel until IFES has submitted, and post has reviewed, the revised statement of work memorandum that we requested in January. We remain open to the possibility of an IFES mission to Jordan at a later date. We also remain open to a locally conducted survey by Jordanian representatives, as discussed with IFES previously. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MEPI Committee members (ADCM, POL, PA, and USAID representatives) met with IFES local coordinator Mohammed Tarawneh on March 8 in response to IFES, request to field an Amcit assessment team for the purpose of conducting interviews with Jordanian officials and electoral stakeholders, in order to complete their MEPI-sponsored regional assessment of electoral systems. The Embassy had previously indicated to IFES in January 2005 that the timing was not appropriate for their planned activities, but that we would consider a revised request, particularly if IFES would rely on local assets for their field survey.

¶3. (C) The Embassy's understanding based on the March 8 meeting is that IFES is not prepared to delegate the assessment to local representatives at this time. Further, we have yet to receive the revised statement of work requested earlier. Under these circumstances, the Embassy does not agree to IFES, plans for an on-the-ground March assessment.

¶4. (C) Background. Electoral reform remains a priority for Jordan, but the issues involved are complex, and the GOJ has had to revise its reform timeline in order to better address the need for consensus. King Abdullah announced his desire for a new, "more democratic" electoral law and system in October 2003. Since that time, however, the government has yet to unveil a draft electoral law due to the divisive and politically sensitive issues surrounding it. Some prominent members of the East Banker old guard, who dominate top levels of the government and the security services, are in particular very wary of changes to the current system that might shift a significant number of seats in the Lower House of parliament to representatives from the Palestinian-origin majority.

¶5. (C) Background continued. The King recently appointed two royal commissions on reform: one to study the creation of elected regional assemblies with devolved powers, the other to establish a &national agenda.⁸ The government intends to unveil new electoral legislation when the national agenda commission reports its conclusions this Fall. The GOJ has informed the Embassy that it does not anticipate seeking outside assistance or advice on electoral reform. Consequently, given the charged atmosphere surrounding this topic, and the GOJ's "hands off" attitude, the arrival of American electoral experts making inquiries on proposed electoral system changes would be counterproductive. Opponents of reform might claim that the American team constituted USG intervention and an effort to put an American stamp on the electoral system. It would also open the government up to charges that the U.S. was seeking to "control" the electoral reform process. In this way, opponents might succeed in derailing any effort to change the system. End Background.

¶6. (C) Embassy believes that IFES could have an important role to play in assisting electoral reform in Jordan, but the timing is not yet ripe for the projects they have in mind. Embassy MEPI Committee will continue working with IFES, as needed, to refine their workplan and their timetable so as to best meet Jordanian reform needs.

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